



Ibis

Justin Haynes

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A fishing village plagued by ghosts and omens unites to protect a refugee girl in Justin Haynes's potent novel *Ibis*.

The site of a vicious sugar plantation centuries ago, New Felicity, Trinidad, is a nexus for Venezuelan refugees. Ibises gathering on Catherine the Disemboweler's former house signal ill fortune to the town's inhabitants. Soon, a reporter interested in Venezuela-Trinidad tensions arrives, threatening unwarranted international attention on Milagros, a rescued refugee girl. Years later, Milagros, now a writer herself, returns to Venezuela seeking her lost mother's whereabouts.

The New Felicity community narrates with nonchalant understatement, using deadpan humor to cope with border-transgressing violence and malicious hauntings dating from the days of slavery. Immersion in the tense but tight-knit New Felicity community is facilitated through slang and vernacular speech patterns, such as "white white," passed down from enslaved predecessors. Milagros's sections jumble private griefs with her professional journalistic mission tied to the ongoing refugee crisis. Her air of investigative inquiry is undercut with maternal longing and frustration.

Brutalized bodies abound in *Ibis*: Mangled corpses float in the waters, a plantation owner whips a slave for no reason other than to show absolute power, and a gang leader's henchman witnesses his brother's head being used as a soccer ball as part of his initiation. The vengeful curses and impassioned pleas of wronged women are powerful voices of reckoning for racial and gender-based injustices; Milagros's mother and Hany, a slave woman, voice fierce determination and selflessness when protecting their daughters from rape and violation. Though themselves guilty of utilitarian violence, New Felicity's villagers unite in compassionate defense of Milagros.

The consequences of colonialism, sexual slavery, and human trafficking are ongoing in *Ibis*, a novel about the origins and aftershocks of the international refugee crisis in Venezuela and Trinidad.

ISABELLA ZHOU (January / February 2025)

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